

NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM APPROVAL

AUDIT VISIT SUMMARY REPORT November 21, 2000

**SAU 61
Farmington, NH**

AUDIT VISIT CONDUCTED ON OCTOBER 12, 2000

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**New Hampshire Department of Education
SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM APPROVAL AUDIT VISIT
SAU 61, Farmington**

INTRODUCTION

A New Hampshire Department of Education Audit visit was conducted on October 12, 2000 in SAU 61 for the purpose of reviewing the issues of noncompliance previously identified during the November 18 and 19, 1998 program approval visit. At that time, a significant pattern of noncompliance was revealed. Specific areas addressed include the following:

- Staffing patterns: the pattern of the high rate of staff turnover resulted in inexperienced and uncertified staff in key positions.
- Staff Training: the high rate of staff turnover coupled with the lack of a special education administrator for the district, resulted in a significant need for current and ongoing professional development for regular and special educators and paraprofessionals.
- Continuum of Services: the district lacked a well developed continuum of services for students with educational disabilities
- Curriculum: the district did not offer a curriculum to students with educational disabilities in programs where students were unable to access the general curriculum
- Procedural Issues: the district was found to have a significant degree of issues of noncompliance related to federal and state regulations for students with educational disabilities
- Facilities: the elementary and middle school facilities were found to be overcrowded with several special education programs in unacceptable settings.

In the period since the November 1998 visit, the SAU has worked to resolve issues of noncompliance and begin an improvement program. The district created the position of Pupil Personnel Director, which provided an opportunity for administration and leadership in the area of special education. Brian Blake, Pupil Personnel Director, along with Superintendent of Schools, Ron Snyder, and the district staff, have managed to initiate a number of improvements in response to the list of issues identified above.

At the time of this recent visit, all staff positions have been filled with individuals appropriately certified in NH or participating in alternative certification programs. Training sessions on the Benchmark Reading Program, in developing a spelling curriculum and in teaching literacy skills were provided. A Sliver Grant was obtained from the NH Department of Education during the previous school year to provide a series of professional development training sessions related to the development of IEP's; legal issues related to the provision of special education; inclusion; Section 504/ADA; special education process and communication disorders.

The issue of procedural compliance to all federal and state regulations for the provision of services to students with disabilities has been addressed through training sessions, revised forms and procedures, and ongoing communication and support to the staff by the administration. The present visit found a significant reduction in areas of noncompliance, an indication that staff has made significant progress in understanding and correcting issues of non-compliance.

Technical assistance was contracted through Stafford Learning Center to create programming for emotionally handicapped middle school students. The facility issues were also addressed and the Developmental Disabilities program was moved to a new location. The SAU office was also relocated to a new building to make room for two special education programs. Curriculums for these programs have been developed. Technical assistance was also provided to the Preschool Program and improvements have been made to that curriculum and general instructional strategy.

The current review team found much improvement throughout the Farmington School District since the previous visit. However, as in any educational system, there continues to be a need for ongoing improvements. Staff training should continue to be offered for all staff, both regular and special education, in areas related to the provision of special education services, as well as best practices in curriculum development, collaboration and instructional strategies. The ongoing space and programming needs will require continued efforts in the area of facility planning. The Middle School and the Elementary School are both seriously overcrowded, impacting the ability to provide a full array of services and program design. The Middle School is presently unable to implement a true middle school model, which would lend itself well to the inclusion of students and staff in a genuine team model. Programs that are presently self-contained should be provided with clear opportunities for students to have access to the general curriculum and to be fully included in their schools. The curriculum development in the district should be clearly aligned with the New Hampshire Curriculum Frameworks. Budgets should be developed to provide for updated curriculum materials and ongoing acquisition of current technology. Staffing patterns should be reviewed on a regular basis to insure that the staff to student ratio is appropriate, particularly in the area of special education. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the district should continue efforts to create a current and meaningful District Improvement Plan that addresses all aspects of instructional growth and outlines a vision and plan for the next few years. The philosophy regarding the inclusion of all students in the Farmington School District should be consistent throughout the district and understood by the educational and larger community.

In summary, the Superintendent of Schools, Director of Pupil Personnel and district staff, with the support of the School Board, are commended for the efforts made to correct issues of noncompliance and seek overall improvements. They are encouraged to continue their collective efforts toward creating an effective educational system that can successfully provide educational programming to all of the district's students.

FARMINGTON PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

COMMENDATIONS:

- The Preschool Program's classroom space is colorful, bright and cheery.
- The Preschool staff works well as a team and provides effective consistency in providing services to students.
- The Preschool staff offers a great deal of language modeling to the students.
- The total communication program used by the Preschool Program is effective.
- The Preschool staff have developed a good relationship with FCESS (Family Centered Early Supports and Services) in an effort to provide smooth and effective transitions.
- The collaboration with the Memorial Drive Elementary School Kindergarten Program for field trips and special events is a good start for providing students opportunities for interactions with typical peers.
- The referrals, evaluations, written reports and meetings are conducted in a timely manner.

CITATIONS:CFR300.552

CFR300.26 Students presently have limited opportunities to interact in a variety of education environments with non-disabled students.

CFR300.347 Present levels of educational performance on student IEP's should include statements regarding the extent to which preschool students participate in appropriate activities as well as an explanation of the extent to which the child will not participate with non-disabled children in the regular class.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Create further opportunities for preschool students to interact and participate with typically developing peers. Such opportunities may exist within the kindergarten program, the library story hour, at the Farmington Child Care/Head Start program, etc.
- Consider methods to increase parents comfort with participation in the actual development of their child's IEP.
- Work to create meaningful IEP objectives that relate clearly to the stated measurable goal. (Example: Break down hand washing goal into C. will wash his hands successfully by attempting all 5 steps 3 out of 4 tries in a week: wetting hands, applying soap, washing, rinsing, drying).
- Curriculum development should reflect best practices for typical preschool students.
- Consider a review of the effectiveness of the "work jobs" system in place. It may be more beneficial to students if their learning is done within the context of a typical setting.

MEMORIAL DRIVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

COMMENDATIONS:

- The staff at the elementary school work hard and work together as a team.
- The school staff have been able to take a critical look at school programs and procedures and make improvements.
- School staff has taken advantage of outside resources (e.g. Institute on Disabilities and the Department of Education).
- There is noted improvement in the approach to discipline, with additional training already scheduled.
- Efforts to improve the quality of special education programming are evident.
- New curriculum components in the areas of math and reading are a positive addition.
- There has been good effort to communicate with parents.

CITATIONS:Ed. 1107.02(d)**REFERRAL**

The record reviewed did not contain evidence of initial referral.

CFR300.534Ed. 1107.07 (c,3)**PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

Parents were not present at determination decision; unclear if copy of evaluation report and documentation of eligibility was given to parent.

CFR300.345(b)(1)Ed. 1109.04**NOTICE OF MEETING**

No evidence that parents were given a ten-day notice of IEP meeting.

CFR300.504(a)(2)**PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS**

No evidence that Procedural Safeguards were given to parents with the notice of an IEP meeting.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Create a building level committee including relevant district level staff to address issues of communication, understanding and agreement regarding the provision of services for all students at the elementary school. The visiting team felt that differences of philosophy in these important areas exists between elementary school administration and staff impacting current programming and plans for future program improvements. A commonly defined philosophy should be further connected to a district philosophy to ensure consistency of services and smooth transitions.
- The record keeping system for special education files needs to be improved to include documentation of all necessary components of the special education process.
- Create a more adequate space for student records.
- Create a confidential area to conduct special education meetings and student assessments.
- Continue efforts to insure less turnover of both professional and paraprofessional staff to improve consistency in programming and long range planning initiatives.
- Provide ongoing training to all staff (professional and paraprofessional) in all areas of special education procedures to insure that appropriate documentation and process occurs.
- Provide professional development to building level administrators to increase awareness of the federal and state regulations related to the provision of services to students with disabilities.
- Seek alternatives to using special education paraprofessional staff to cover classes in the absence of staff.

MEMORIAL DRIVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, Continued
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- Consider the addition of a school social worker position to assist with home/school communication and related issues.
- Continue work on transition issues that will improve the continuity of services from grade level to grade level and from school to school.
- Consider the designation of a building level facilitator/coordinator.
- Review the amount of time staff must dedicate to paperwork and determine if there are more efficient systems that could help in this area. Clarify the job description for the clerical staff member responsible for supporting special education paperwork.
- Consider increasing the amount of support available from school psychologist.

HENRY WILSON MIDDLE SCHOOL

COMMENDATIONS:

- The forward momentum in programming is evident in comparison to previous visit.
- The staff at the middle school are dedicated and hard working.
- There have been efforts made toward greater parental involvement.
- The special education administration has been very helpful and supportive, particularly in efforts to provide continuity in programming.
- The Emotionally Handicapped Program and the Developmental Disabilities Program are in improved spaces, however efforts should continue to return the programs to the main building.
- The curriculums developed for the Developmental Disabilities Program and the Emotionally Handicapped Program are commendable.
- The classroom teachers have a good understanding of the special education modifications and programs at the middle school
- The paraprofessional staff are very dedicated and work well with teachers and special educators.

CITATIONS:**CFR300.347****Ed. 1109.01(b) IEP COMPONENTS**

IEP is missing several components including:

Measurable annual goals with benchmarks or objectives that enable the child's involvement in the general curriculum and that address other educational needs.

Transition statement for 14 and 15 year olds identifying the student's transition needs focusing on the student's course of study. If transition services are not needed, a statement to that effect and the basis on which it was determined.

Ed. 1109.01(h) DURATION OF SERVICES

IEP's are not implemented for a full year (staff report the service ends in May and June).

Ed. 1119.06 Facilities and Location

Physical space for instruction for students with disabilities shall be comparable to physical space for classrooms and other instructional programs for other students. They should also be located in a building with students of similar age and in the least restrictive environment. The middle school is overcrowded and staff and students, particularly in the special education programs, are not provided with adequate space.

CFR300.347(a,7)ii**PROGRESS**

No statement of how parents will be informed of student progress.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Continue to provide professional development to all staff (professional and paraprofessional) on roles and responsibilities of regular educators in the special education process.
- Continue to improve the relationship between students with educational disabilities and non-disabled students.
- Create curriculum that connects to the NH Curriculum Frameworks.
- Continue to plan for improved facilities for middle school students. The team found the middle school overcrowded, with staff and programs forced to work in less than adequate settings.

HENRY WILSON MIDDLE SCHOOL, Continued
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- Create a consistent system for special education record keeping throughout the district. A suggested format: 4 manila file folders in a hanging folder that includes: 1) IEP/Program/ASP forms; 2) meeting minutes/written prior notices; 3) Evaluations and evaluation summary notes; 4) Permission to test/Correspondence/progress reports
- Create more adequate space for administering student assessments; conducting confidential meetings; working with students and workspace for staff.
- Continue to plan for a true middle school model that would encourage real teaming and provide easier access to the least restrictive environment for special education staff and students with disabilities.

FARMINGTON HIGH SCHOOL

COMMENDATIONS:

- The high school staff were personable, cooperative and well informed.
- The high school has a positive atmosphere. The building is an accessible, clean, attractive and well organized. The presence of technology, equipment and curriculum materials was found to be in good shape and well utilized by staff and students.
- Regular education teachers report feeling supported by special education teachers and paraprofessional staff.
- The relationship between the school and parents is excellent. Telephone calls made to incoming freshmen helps the transition process for students with disabilities.
- The building principal is commended for his overall effective administration of the school. He is a leader who advocates for students, staff and school in a proactive manner.
- The DD classroom was well organized. Adult services connections are well established in preparation for transition. Vocational programming is evident. The student volunteer tutoring component is good.
- The Jobs for American Graduates Program is very active.
- The addition of the district special education administrator has been beneficial.
- The Resource Officer was present and it appears that the connections made to the court system are mutual and effective.

CITATIONS:

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| <u>Ed. 1109.01</u> | <u>IEP Components</u>
The IEP's reviewed did not include a vocational component for student receiving vocational programming; a statement of special education and related services required to advance toward goals, be involved in general curriculum, participate in extracurricular activities and be educated with non-disabled students; projected dates and duration of services; location of services and modifications. |
| <u>Ed. 1113.01</u> | <u>Vocational Assessment</u>
There was no vocational assessment present in the record reviewed. |
| <u>Ed. 1123.04</u> | <u>Confidentiality</u>
There was no public listing of names and positions of those employees who have access to personally identifiable information. |
| <u>Ed. 1123.14</u> | <u>Record of Disclosure</u>
There is no Record of Disclosure form available in the student records. |

SUGGESTIONS:

- Review staffing patterns for special education staff at the high school. The review team reports a concern regarding caseload numbers and staff feeling overwhelmed and overworked. Consider addition of professional and/or paraprofessional special education staff so that students with disabilities can receive the full support necessary for access to the general curriculum and progress toward the completion of a diploma.
- Create time for consultation between special and regular education staff so that student progress, modifications and support can be collaboratively addressed.

FARMINGTON HIGH SCHOOL, Continued
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- Consider the addition of clerical support to assist with the extensive amount of special education paperwork, communications and organization required.
- Review systems and create new organization for the special education process (e.g. Lists of student three year evaluation due dates, consistent organization of student records).
- Provide ongoing professional development opportunities for all staff (professional and paraprofessional) that addresses critical issues such as the revised IDEA '97 and the expanded role of regular educator in special education process; orientation of new special education staff, etc..
- Review the continuum of services available for students with disabilities. The visiting team felt there is a gap between what the DD Program offers and what the Resource Room Program offers.

ADDENDUM

JAMES O. MONITORING PROGRAM

SAU 61

STUDENT FILE REVIEW

CASE STUDY DOCUMENT

REIMBURSEMENT CLAIM FORM

CASE STUDY ADDENDUM FORM

ADDENDUM
JAMES O. MONITORING PROGRAM

SAU 61

NUMBER OF FILES REVIEWED: 1 FILE

CITATIONS:

Ed1109.01(g) The IEP does not include the projected dates for initiation and anticipated duration of Services.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Continue to closely monitor students with educational disabilities in court ordered placements and carefully document all aspects of the special education services and programming indicated.